



General Assembly

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10 May 2002

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Twenty-seventh special session

Summary of round tables on the theme "Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade"

Round table 1

Wednesday, 8 May 2002 (afternoon)

Co-Chairs: Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania
Mr. Nambar Enkhbayar, Prime Minister of Mongolia

"We acknowledge this beautiful building that protects and unites us today."
Te Kerei Moka, 17, New Zealand

"To love, care for and protect us should be a life-long privilege."
Caroline Barebwoha, 15, Uganda

1. Following the lead of two young delegates, education was one of the main themes addressed during the round table. Both delegates, Caroline Barebwoha and Te Kerei Moka, stressed the importance of education, especially for girls and children from indigenous groups.
2. Many participants spoke of progress in their own countries in ensuring all children's right to education. Of course, some countries have made greater progress than others, and progress has been less than satisfactory in some respects, as the Secretary-General made clear in his report, "We, the Children".
3. Education is a basic human right and one of the keys to eradicating poverty. Speakers described laws that make primary education free and compulsory and, more importantly, discussed how critical it is to ensure that this education be of high quality, take place in a safe and well-equipped environment and that teachers be well-trained. Quality pre-school education and early childhood development are fundamental to children's longer term development, followed by quality primary and secondary education.
4. The lack of financial resources continues to hinder the development of quality education, as does the lack of equipment and trained personnel in many countries.



Many participants spoke of the importance of interregional and international cooperation in maximizing limited resources and sharing experiences.

5. Technology in education has emerged as a new priority, especially computer literacy and access to the Internet. The importance of this technology will only grow in the next decade, but as was pointed out several times, in some countries, desks, infrastructure and even electricity are still lacking in schools in many countries.

6. Another important theme was children's health and survival. Many delegates spoke of impressive achievements since 1990 in decreasing child and maternal mortality through immunization, primary health care and nutrition. However, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Gro Harlan Brundtland, said that while there has been progress since 1990, it has not been enough. The world is still not reaching the children most in need of simple, inexpensive, life-saving treatments such as immunization, oral rehydration therapy, safe deliveries and basic hygiene practices.

7. Several participants also spoke about the importance of adequate food and nutrition for children's healthy development. The Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), James Morris, stressed that "a hungry child has no chance to learn, no chance to grow". In some countries, however, children face other challenges to their health, including diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Other problems facing children today include violence in schools and drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse.

8. Many delegations stressed the importance of the family to children's development and well-being, including the need for interaction between young people and their elders, and for children to be raised in their own cultures, with respect for their traditions and the natural environment. Te Kerei Moka, a young Maori, spoke of the daily battles of most indigenous people to maintain their language and traditions. "To lose one's culture is to lose one's soul", he said, "a part of you dies". It was said that even in wealthy countries, there must be better distribution of resources to ensure that minorities do not lose their right to education. In countries with large numbers of institutionalized children, efforts are under way to support families to care for their children themselves or to provide family-type care.

9. The threat of HIV/AIDS was mentioned again and again, with speakers citing continuing efforts to educate and mobilize young people against this disease, through initiatives such as life-skills training, and to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Other important efforts involve care for children orphaned or made vulnerable by AIDS.

10. Another major threat to children is continued armed conflict. The participants were reminded of the hundreds of thousands of children who have never known peace, been to school or received any health care because of war and conflict. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Rudd Lubbers, spoke about the special challenges faced by refugee children, including detention, sexual abuse and exploitation of refugee women and children. He also cited the need for education for refugee children.

11. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, underlined the importance of children's real participation, reminding participants of the message from the Children's Forum that they want "a world fit for us". Many

speakers described children's opinion polls, elections, parliaments and other forums where children's voices can be heard. One important forum is the network of ombudspersons, or child defenders, of which there are 17 in Europe.

12. Another important issue was the question of monitoring and assessing progress in implementing the goals of the special session. One important suggestion was to encourage regional peer reviews involving national leaders, who would meet periodically to assess progress made in fulfilling their commitments. Other participants stressed the need for region-specific data to allow for more accurate reporting and for regional agendas concentrating on areas of specific interest.

13. The question of resources was raised many times, as was the importance of poverty eradication. Vast resources will be needed to achieve the targets of the special session, although resources are scarce and there is vast competition for funds. Some participants urged donors to increase resource allocations for development, including through debt cancellation. One valuable suggestion was that Governments could look again at the possibility of reducing military expenditures and using the dividends for children's health and education. As 15-year-old Caroline said, "there is a need to invest in us, the children ... we are the world's own destiny".



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Summaries of round tables on the theme "Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade"

Round table 2

Thursday, 9 May 2002 (morning)

Co-Chairs: Mrs. Tarja **Halonén**, President of the Republic of Finland
Mr. Vicente **Fox**, President of the United Mexican States

"I am the voice of all the children who have suffered throughout the world ... you who are members of mankind — why have you let these things happen?"

Marie-Claire Umuhoza, Rwanda

"Give us, your children, a good today. We will, in turn, give you a good tomorrow."

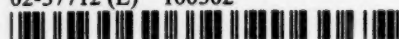
Toukir Ahmed, Bangladesh

1. The importance of listening to children and young people in a true inter-generational dialogue was one of the major themes of this round table. Today, they made their voices heard. In addition to Marie-Claire Umuhoza and Toukir Ahmed, the child delegates who opened the meeting, other young delegates told us of their concerns.

2. Marie-Claire eloquently described the devastating effects of violence on her family and her country, telling us that her parents had been killed and she and her three sisters had been forced to flee. "I am here without a father, a mother ... no one to call me 'my child'. Call me your daughter. I need love."

3. Toukir spoke of the need to combat exploitation and abuse in a world where there was violence and cruelty, conflict and war, and where children required special attention, especially against child trafficking and child abuse.

4. The other young delegates stressed the importance of real participation by children and young people, as well as the rights of refugee children, girls and indigenous children. One said that the issue of participation was not taken seriously in the outcome document. They reminded us that our biggest challenge is what to do when we go home, to make our words a reality.



5. Equality was a major theme of the morning's discussion. Every child must have an equal opportunity to grow and develop, beginning with a safe delivery and access to medical care and education. Children in vulnerable groups, including refugees, ethnic minorities, immigrants, indigenous children and disabled children, need special care and attention. Not enough is being done for girls' education. The importance of reconfirming rights was also stressed; education, not working and access to reproductive health services are rights, not privileges, according to one participant.

6. Many participants stressed the importance of living up to existing international commitments and not going backwards. One said, "this forum cannot accept that children are negotiable". Another underlined the need for leadership and high-level participation from developed and developing countries at events like the special session.

7. The issue of adequate resources was raised repeatedly. It was said that only five countries have met the target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to development assistance, and that the rich world has to give more, but it has to be used more effectively. There must be a genuine partnership between donors and programme countries and, in addition to bilateral assistance programmes, there must be a global plan for children. Within countries, more resources must be allocated to children. Many speakers appealed for debt relief in favour of children and for fair access to markets.

8. Many speakers stressed the special needs of Africa, which had been affected by poverty, conflict and disease. Malaria affected Africa more than any other continent, and Africa was especially devastated by HIV/AIDS. The Executive Director of UNAIDS, Peter Piot, said that, in southern Africa, a 15-year-old boy today has a 60 per cent chance of contracting HIV and subsequently dying of AIDS. He also said that AIDS prevention and care must be integrated into all development, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, stating that "AIDS has to be part of everything we do because it is part of life". A number of speakers said that adolescents must not be denied their rights to reproductive health services in the face of this disease.

9. Following the statement by Marie-Claire, many participants spoke of the harm done to children by conflict and war. It was stressed that there must be early warning systems, and that the United Nations has a role in preventing conflict. In addition to immediate relief, children affected by conflict required longer-term assistance and psychosocial care from specially trained teachers and caregivers, even after the media and the public had lost interest. In such situations, children must be asked about their views and feelings. One participant said that conflict often resulted in violations of children's right to health because of lack of access to affected areas. Another reminded the round table that man-made disasters were equally damaging to children's health and well-being.

10. The importance of education, especially for girls, was underlined by many speakers. The Deputy Director-General for Education of UNESCO, John Daniel, spoke on behalf of the members of the Education for All consortium, outlining progress made in terms of national plans and international developments like the Monterrey Consensus and increased funding for education from the World Bank.

11. The exploitation of children, child trafficking and hazardous child labour were condemned by many speakers. Governments were urged to ratify the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography, in order to ensure accountability for these crimes. The sexual abuse of children, which was a problem all over the world, required greater cooperation with the police. The Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Juan Somavia, said that 180 million children are involved in the worst forms of child labour. Many of them work because their parents are unable to earn enough. He said that today's global economy is not generating the jobs that their parents require in order to support their families, so that children are forced to work.

12. Many speakers outlined measures their countries are taking to protect children's rights, including the designation of ombudspersons for children, the formation of children's parliaments and the development of national plans of action. Countries are also enacting national legislation and reforming juvenile justice systems to conform to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The latter are especially relevant in the light of new problems that have emerged, including violence in schools, drug addiction and drug trafficking. Because children require the love and affection of a family, many countries are moving away from institutions and working with communities and non-governmental organizations to support foster families for orphans and other children without families.

13. The importance of regional and international cooperation was stressed by several participants, who have organized networks and working groups and are sharing information, for example to combat child trafficking and child pornography. This type of cooperation is also important for collecting data on children for monitoring and follow-up to international conferences like the special session. Participants said that follow-up to the special session should not result in more bureaucracy, but in real results. Sharing of best practices by the United Nations system would help to accelerate progress.

14. Two common threads of the debate were the need to generate resources, and that economic development went hand in hand with human development. The special session on children was part of a "cycle of virtue" which included the International Conference on Financing for Development, recently held at Monterrey, Mexico, and the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held at Johannesburg, South Africa, later this year. The overriding priority of this cycle was children and young people. The world must respond to the challenges facing young people and move from commitments to action.



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Summary of round tables on the theme "Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade"

Round table 3

Friday, 10 May 2002 (morning)

Co-Chairs: Mr. Sher Bahadur **Duba**, Prime Minister of Nepal
Mr. Levy **Mwanawasa**, President of Zambia

*"Listen to what we have to say, because it will help
you make the right decisions for us ... and with us."*

Sara Mendic, Yugoslavia

"We need you to believe in us and invest in us."

Ngenfat Yang, Suriname

1. Two child delegates set the tone for the round-table discussion. Sara Mendic of Yugoslavia spoke about the need for education and schools that are fit for children, saying that poor quality schools "can make us study but they cannot make us learn". Ngenfat Yang of Suriname stressed the lifelong toll that abuse and exploitation take on children, asking participants to "imagine the many children who are abused ... who are sold ... who don't have families to care for them" and asking, "where is their future?" Other young people joined the round table as part of their national delegations, speaking about violence in the home, drug abuse and the rights of indigenous children.

2. A number of themes arose throughout the discussion. The question of resources was perhaps the main theme, because adequate resources are vital to achieving the goal of "A world fit for children". The round table heard many calls for meeting international targets for official development assistance and for increasing resources for programmes benefiting children and women. There was a call for good governance and investment in people, as well as claims that aid for children not be subject to conditionalities. All participants agreed that the cycle of poverty must end if children are to have a good future. There were calls for fairer trading systems and open markets and for economic solutions that look at the realities of countries today.



3. HIV/AIDS is threatening the lives of children, especially in Africa, where the gains of the last 50 years have been lost in the last 5 to 10 years. In addition to drugs at reduced or preferential prices, countries need appropriate infrastructures, clinics, trained health workers, voluntary counselling and testing, as well as clean water. The Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Kunio Waki, said that we have to trust young people and empower them by educating them about reproductive health.

4. Many participants stressed the importance of paying special attention to the needs and rights of girls to adequate nutrition, education and protection from abuse and exploitation, especially given the dangers of HIV/AIDS. In many families, girls still do not go to school because parents cannot afford fees for all their children and so send only the boys to school.

5. Education remains critical to children's development as productive and happy members of society, beginning with pre-school through primary and secondary school. The particular importance of quality primary education was stressed and there were calls for quality education that trains children for our changing world, teaching them new skills, including entrepreneurship, science and technology. There must be adequately trained teachers. Access to computers and the Internet are critical for bridging the digital divide. Children must also learn about things that interest them and develop their creativity, as one of the young delegates pointed out. Children must learn tolerance and respect for others and for the environment. They must be taught about their rights so that they, in turn, may educate their families.

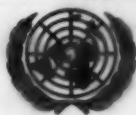
6. There were a number of comments about corporal punishment in schools, with some speakers saying it was accepted in their countries. Ngenfat Yang said that he had been hit and told he was dumb, and that there should not be a "bossy" relationship between students and teachers. "Pay attention to our goals and don't put us down", he said. One participant said there should be positive disciplinary measures in place of corporal punishment.

7. The education of the child begins in the family, which ensures that children have a good start in life. Participants stressed the important role played by both mothers and fathers in the lives of their children. As one of the young speakers said, children have a right to live without violence in their homes. Several participants said their Governments had enacted legislation to protect children from abuse in their homes, but that it was also vital to teach and socialize policemen, children and families themselves and the rest of society to respect these laws. It was stated that while the State had the main responsibility for protecting rights, families, communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also shared that responsibility. In some cases, families require financial or other support so they can send their children to school instead of working.

8. Many speakers spoke of the devastating effects of conflict on children. Conflict harms children physically — they are abducted as child soldiers and are maimed and mutilated, injured by landmines or wounded in combat. It also prevents them from receiving immunization and health services and halts their education. Conflict also harms children emotionally and mentally, and children affected by conflict need special care and attention. Other participants spoke about other forms of exploitation of children, especially sexual exploitation, and the recent Yokohama Declaration on this issue.

9. The young people all said that words must be followed by clear action. Many participants at the round table spoke of the need for legal mechanisms to match political commitments, as well as the need for the development and implementation of national laws and judicial systems reflecting the contents of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The importance of reaching minorities and marginalized children was stressed by several participants. Many countries have children's parliaments and other means for children to express themselves, including newspapers written by children for children.

10. Many participants, including the young delegates, emphasized the importance of agreeing on the final text of the outcome document so that when everyone returned home from New York they would have something positive to build on. As one of the Co-Chairs said in closing, the future would be too ghastly to contemplate if the world did not move forwards from here.

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Agenda item 3

**Credentials of representatives to the twenty-seventh
special session of the General Assembly**

**Letter dated 10 May 2002 from the Permanent Representative
of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President
of the General Assembly**

I write to you in my capacity as Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Following your appeal to make this special session on children a memorable occasion, and after consultations with the co-sponsors of the amendment to the draft resolution of the Credentials Committee, we have decided not to insist on a vote on our amendment contained in document A/S-27/L.2.

For the record, we wish to state that this amendment is in line with the Declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement, who met from 27 to 29 April 2002 in Durban, South Africa. It is based on, and is reflective of, international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

In light of the above, we intend to raise this matter during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, beginning 10 September 2002.

We request that the present letter be distributed as a document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 3.

(Signed) Dumisani S. Kumalo
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

